

Time Management For Lawyers

Practicing good time management skills will allow you to be more productive and reduce stress in your practice. Developing and maintaining good time management skills is a continual process. It will take on-going practice to change any bad habits you may have.

Evidence of enhanced time management skills will result in improvement to your bottom line. You will be able to bill more hours. If you capture just 30 minutes more a day at a billing rate of \$200 an hour you will add approximately \$24,000 to your revenue. Not a small number for a little more time.

You don't *find time* - you *make time*. That takes planning and being proactive.

Self-Assess

The following steps are necessary in order to successfully achieve your time management goals:

1. Do a self-assessment – what are your strengths and weaknesses in managing time?
2. What will motivate you to implement new time management strategies?
3. Come up with a time management plan designed to fit *your* style of operating.
4. Model time management skills of others that you admire.
5. Make your time management goals or structures clear, realistic and manageable with small steps to get you where you want to go.
6. Give yourself time to practice the new behaviors.
7. Don't let slip ups throw you off course – notice you've faltered and get back to your time management plan.
8. Increase your level of self-confidence so you trust your judgment.
9. Let go of perfectionism.

80/20 Rule

Good time management requires learning how the 80/20 rule impacts you. The 80/20 rule, or Pareto principal, states that the relationship between input and output is rarely, if ever, balanced. When applied to work, it means that approximately *20 percent of your efforts produce 80 percent of your results*. Learning how to recognize and then focusing on that 20 percent is the key to making the most effective use of your time.

21 Time Management Tips

1. Take *time* to prepare and review your time management plan.
2. Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rewarding, and Timely) goals. A goal could include tracking all your time, even non-billable time, for a week in order to learn how you spend the time in your day.

3. Identify your priorities. Apply the 80/20 rule. Every time you say *yes* to something you are saying *no* to something else. Make sure you choose your actions. See Exhibit A.
4. Learn to say *no*. See Exhibit A.
5. Learn how to minimize interruptions. See Exhibit A on how to say *no*.
6. Plan for the unexpected. Do not overbook yourself. Create space in your calendar for all the last minute matters that show up in your practice.
7. Learn the skill of delegation – this includes training those you delegate to to meet your standards.
8. Delegate.
9. Take time to get organized. This includes cleaning the piles of paper from your office floor.
10. Use **‘To Do’** Lists. ‘To Do’ lists are essential to an efficient use of your time and a way to reduce stress in your practice. ‘To do’ lists help in situations of overwhelm because they bring perspective and planning back to the situation and put you back in control. See Exhibit B.
11. Create artificial deadlines to help move a task to action.
12. Identify and eliminate tasks that will not benefit you.
13. No matter how busy you are don’t start the next matter until you have recorded your time. Record your time compulsively. Your time is a very valuable commodity – only give it away intentionally.
14. Learn how long it really takes for you to do things.
15. Schedule or block out time on your calendar for tasks.
16. Defeat procrastination. See Exhibit C.
17. Leverage some of your activities.
18. Learn how to control meetings and telephone calls.
19. Learn to control your paperwork.
20. Learn to control your email & voice mail – come up with boundaries and rules regarding them.
21. Set up structures to help you change your behaviors. See Exhibit D.

Exhibit A

Are you able to say no?

Your ability to say *no* is an important component of your time management skills. It determines how much of your time will be spent doing things you don't want or have the time to do.

How easily you say *no* is a matter of your personality rather than knowledge of time management skills. The ability to say no is not about being mean and aggressive. Instead, it is about being assertive. Learn assertiveness skills if necessary.

Reasons you need to learn to say no include:

- The cost of not saying no will become greater over time.
- The truth is better than not telling the truth.
- Put saying *no* into the larger context. What is really important?
- Realizing that sometimes it will be difficult for you to say no – sometimes there just is pain.
- When you say no you will feel relief in the long run.

Examples of Saying No

- *"I already have a meeting at that time."*
- *"I can start that next week and deliver something by"*
- *"I am not able to handle your matter for two weeks. May I suggest someone else? Or would you like to wait for me to handle it?"*
- *"I'm in the middle of something now. May I get back to you ...?"*
- *"I'm sorry I won't be able to attend. Thanks for asking."*
- *"Let me call you back at 3pm when I have more time to give you the attention you deserve."*

Say *yes* only if your goals will be met by doing the thing you just said yes to. Say *no* as early as possible.

Complete the following exercise to help you notice when you say *yes* to something you are saying *no* to something else. Design your practice in such a way that you always know the consequences of a *yes* or *no* answer.

Examples of saying yes and no include:

- Saying yes to a client while saying no to your intuitive sense.
- Saying yes to working late means saying no to going home to your family or having some fun outside of work.
- Saying yes to taking Saturday off means saying no to getting your office organized.

Saying Yes --- Saying No

By saying YES to:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

I am saying NO to:

By saying NO to:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

I am saying YES to:

Exhibit B

Completion List

	Matter to complete	By when	Done
1.	<i>Do my to do list daily.</i>	By 9:05 am daily	
2.			
3.			

Procrastination

"Procrastination is the thief of time." Edward Young

If procrastination is a problem for you, it is necessary that you learn tools to handle your procrastination. Procrastination occurs when you are faced with too many decisions and are unable to complete matters of importance. "Procrastination is putting off until tomorrow what needs to be done today". Knowing the reasons you are putting off doing something can have the effect of resolving the matter or changing your behavior so you complete the outstanding matter.

To determine why you are putting off doing something - work through this three-part exercise.

Answer these questions:

What is the *real reason* behind your procrastination?

What is stopping you?

Reasons For Procrastinating:

Consider whether any of these reasons are the reasons you procrastinate. Tick all that apply and think about their impact on you:

- You are trying to do too much.
- You don't know what to do or how. This usually means you need to do some research or clarify the task.
- You underestimated the difficulty of the task.
- You underestimated the time it takes to complete the task.
- Your standards are too high. Perfectionism is holding you back.
- You are not convinced of the benefits of doing the task.
- You are not really committed to the matter.
- You choose to do other things. You are saying "yes" to other things.
- You have some belief that is getting in the way. I.e. "*I can't do this.*"
- You are afraid you will fail. Raise your consciousness about your fears.

See the next section on how to overcome your fears.

Notice Underlying Fear

Tick-off any of the following that might apply to stop you from starting or completing a matter. You are afraid because you might:

- Make a mistake
- Lose respect
- Be rejected
- Be embarrassed
- Make a bad decision
- Need to change the way you comfortably do things
- Not know enough
- Look desperate
- Not be able to find out what you need to know
- Miss something important
- Not be able to do this matter
- Lose control.

All people experience fear - some more than others. It is important to appreciate that fearful thinking makes you feel worse than you would feel if you actually did the action you are putting off.

You have choices when fear is present. One choice is to simply go through the fear and do what you want or need to do in order to accomplish the matter. And, of course, the other choice is continue to let the fear stop you.

Defeating Procrastination

Once you have thought about what causes you to procrastinate then consider these structures for defeating or managing procrastination. The following ideas may help you take action on what you have been procrastinating:

- Use a 'to do' list.
- Break the objective down into small steps.
- Do the background research. Find out what you need to know.
- Maybe you don't want to do this thing at all. Remove it from your 'to do list'.
- Set deadlines that you share with someone and ask them to hold you accountable.

- ___ Delegate the matter to someone else.
- ___ Hire someone to handle the matter.
- ___ Choose the first easy step you can take and get started. Action leads to further action.
- ___ Do the hard thing first.
- ___ Notice the critical self-talk. How much energy is being wasted?
- ___ If one way is not working, do something else. Compare what works in handling others matters.
- ___ Periodically fire clients.
- ___ Say “no” to something else. E.g. Interruptions or work you don’t like.
- ___ Do the thing you want to do first.
- ___ Do the thing you least want to do first.
- ___ Schedule or block out time in your calendar.
- ___ Take a deep breath and start.
- ___ Be realistic. (Don’t let perfectionism get in your way.)
- ___ Will doing this support your goals?
- ___ Take a break.

Write down what you notice about the reasons you procrastinate. Come up with your plan to defeat procrastination.

Exhibit D

Structures to Help you Change Your Time Management Behaviors

It is important to have structures in place to help you change your behaviors. Consider using the following to help you meet your time management goals. Check-off all those you are willing to use to meet your goals:

- Visualize your results (Really imagine what it will look like when you have control of your time.)
- Believe in yourself (Trust that you have the skills and knowledge to accomplish what you set out to accomplish.)
- Notice your limiting beliefs. e.g. *“It is not appropriate to say no to clients or senior partners.”*
- Use affirmations (Affirmations are statements of belief that what you want to happen is already true. For example: *“I am efficient and get what needs to be done done.”*)
- Check in with your core values (Notice whether you are in alignment with your values in the actions you are taking.)
- Work with a buddy (Work with a co-worker or friend to create accountability and motivation in reaching your time management goals.)
- Work with a professional like a coach (Use the professional’s expertise to help you see what might be holding you back.)
- Maintain discipline (Just do it!)
- Give yourself rewards for your successes.

Bibliography, Resources and Suggested Readings

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